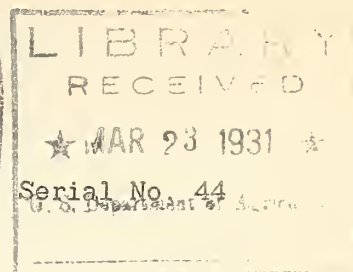
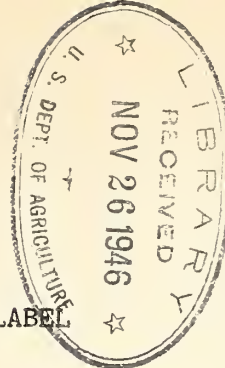


Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1. 9
F732
EXCERPT FROM A RADIO TALK BY
W. R. M. Wharton, chief, eastern district,
Food and Drug Administration, U. S.
Department of Agriculture, broadcast
through WJZ, New York, and associated
N.B.C. stations, March 9, 1931.



HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Patent Medicines

I intend no condemnation of the patent medicine business, of itself, and I am not opposed to all self-medication. There are a great many products which are useful as home treatments for simple ailments and as first aids. There are many drugs which are palliatives and aids in treating disorders, and some that are useful in the relief of pain, but practically all have very decided limitations. Many are worthless. Some are dangerous. I refer to the nostrums, to ineffective, worthless, and falsely and fraudulently labeled medicines.

Perhaps the most misleading form of fake medicine labeling and advertising is that involving the use of testimonials. I have investigated thousands of testimonials which have been used to further the sale of patent medicines. As a result of these extensive investigations, I know that medicine testimonials are practically worthless. There is no question but that the reading of what purports to be a personal statement reporting beneficial results from taking this or that patent medicine has an effect in persuading people to buy that particular medicine. That is what testimonials are designed to do. But some testimonials are given for pay of one kind or another. One testimonial giver will take money; another, a new suit of clothes; some a supply of their own pictures; others a supply of the particular medicine. Some give testimonials because they like to see their names or pictures in print. Then, too, we have to consider the testimonials furnished with honest intent. We are all more or less disposed to think if we get well after adopting any particular measure that the method adopted is responsible for our recovery. The old Romans had a proverb, "Post hoc, ergo propter hoc," that is, "after this, therefore because of this." Doubtless many honest testimonials are based on faulty reasoning of this kind.

But let us suppose that a person with a headache took a medicine and, actually, as a result of this medicine, was freed from the headache. His testimonial to this effect is printed by the medicine-maker for the purpose obviously of creating in the mind of every other sufferer from headache the idea that this medicine, having cured the condition in the case of one testimonial writer, would do the same for every user. Unthinking people are readily taken in by this line of reasoning. They do not stop to reflect that headaches are due to many causes and that, although a medicine will relieve a headache due to one cause, it may have no effect on headaches due to various other causes.

Other honest testimonials are given by people who think they have been benefitted when, as a matter of fact, they have received no benefit at all. It is a well known fact, for example, that patients suffering from tuberculosis at times feel better, even though no improvement in the disease condition has taken place. Such an experience on the part of one who is taking a medicine may readily result in a testimonial for the medicine. We have on file numerous death certificates of writers of testimonials for would-be tuberculosis remedies showing tuberculosis as the cause of death. You will readily appreciate, therefore, what little confidence can be placed in testimonials.

A desirable precaution for label readers is to remember that the quack sometimes gives his company a high sounding name, such as, for example, The World Research and Chemical Extraction Corporation. Read the manufacturer's name with this idea in mind.

Another form of misleading labeling of worthless medicines is the use of coined names suggesting that they are useful in the cure of serious diseases such as, for example, "Tuberculoids," "Lungheala," "Femaline," "Vagaseptic," "Novavita," "As-Ma-Syde." All of these are actual names of products which have been proceeded against under the food and drugs act as fraudulently misbranded. There have been thousands of such coined names used.

Beware of the names, "Bear Oil," "Life Wine," "Rattlesnake Oil," "Magic Trokeys," "Life Balm," and the like. Products under these and similar names have been declared fraudulent under the Federal food and drugs act.

Minimize the importance of nostrum slogans. Some fix your mind on the possibility of your having, or of getting, a serious disease. Some are indirect promises of cures which the products cannot effect. Some just serve to fix the name of a definite product in your minds. They all urge you to buy.

Many medicine fakers print their own likenesses on their labels and on their advertising circulars, often with a facsimile signature. Look these pictures over carefully. Generally, the very faces of the fakers betray their characters. I had an alleged tuberculosis cure before me recently. It was accompanied by a reproduction of the photograph of the proprietor - a dignified looking individual. On close examination, however, he appeared to be a faker. Listen to what he said on the circular with his photograph: "I certify that my tuberculosis compound contains no creosote, mercury, calomel, strychnine, no narcotics or habit-forming drugs. nor anything irritating. dangerous, or harmful to the stomach or intestines. It contains only tested exhilarating and vitalizing herbs, roots, and ingredients that eliminate the bugs." Have you ever heard such a meaningless statement? Why was it made?

Note the words used! Note the words, "exhilarating and vitalizing."

Note the slang use of the word, 'bugs.' Do you suppose any honest scientist would ever make such an expression? Unfortunately, there are no drugs or combinations of drugs which will of themselves cure tuberculosis. Now my advice about this photograph-display business is to study such pictures with the idea of determining for yourselves whether they represent fakers. When they appear on medicines sold for the cure of serious diseases they are likenesses of fakers.

The next caution is to beware of products labeled with bombastic language. When you see such expressions as: "The boon of bountiful nature," "Nature's colossal creation," "Microbes run rampant unless you curb them," and other exaggerated expressions, remember that bombast is another tool of the faker.

Another method of the medicine faker is to practice mental suggestion to make you believe you have some serious disease. Many people, on reading lurid descriptions of symptoms as are often found in medicine almanacs, become introspective and convinced that they have a disease which doesn't really exist at all. Such people are very prone to become habitual medicine takers. And let me say that fake medicines are a drain on the pocketbooks of a large part of our population. They keep some families in poverty.

Beware of claims that products are of God-given origin - or that they are results of dream revelations - or that they have come down from father to son from some remote but wise source - or that an Indian medicine man had something to do with their origin. Such claims are usually false, silly, and meaningless.

More subtle appeals to your credulity and patronage are those that are based on recent and popular scientific developments in medicine and nutrition. Practically every popular scientific discovery is seized upon for exploitation purposes and followed by a host of fake products labeled in a manner to capitalize on the public's conception of the discovery. Illustrating this, I may point to the fact that a vast number of products have been offered to the public on the basis of vitamin claims. Appeals are made to you to buy medicines because of their vitamin content. Some of these are worthless, many of the claims are exaggerated, and you are frequently given an erroneous idea of the public's need for vitamins. Because of such appeals, you may spend good money for so-called "vitamin" concoctions which you may not need at all. Read labels carefully - note the real meaning of the language employed - and ascertain exactly, in so far as possible, what the limitations of the products are, because generally they have decided limitations.

